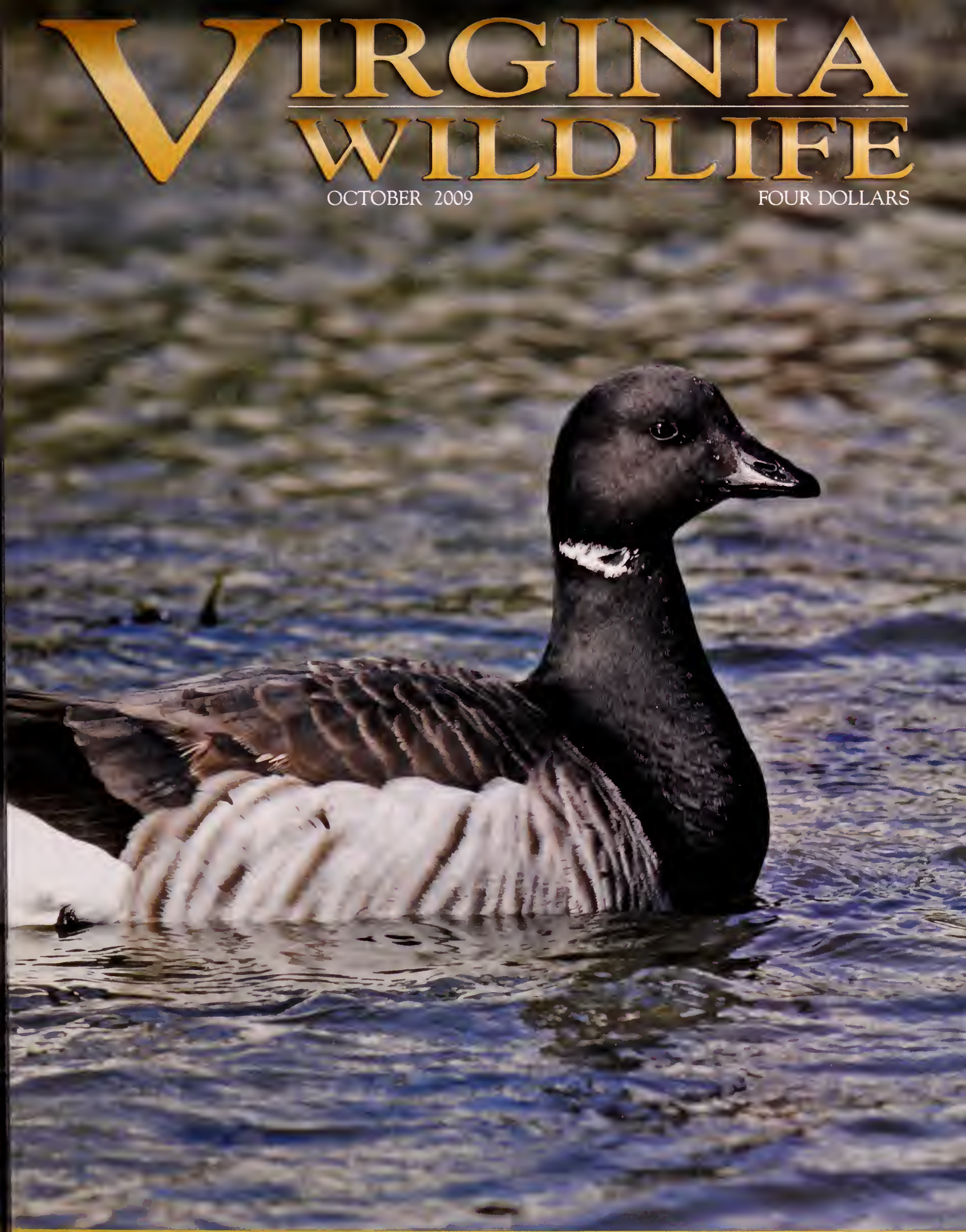
VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

OCTOBER 2009 FOUR DOLLARS



Clamming with Brant • A Quail Raising Tale • Bowfin at Lake Cohoon

Commonwealth of Virginia
Timothy M. Kaine, Governor

Bob Duncan
Executive Director

One of the reasons I hunt, and have enjoyed doing so since I was a kid, has little to do with the chase or the certainty of a harvest. It has everything to do with simply being outdoors. Whether I go afield alone, as often happens, or share the hunting experience in a blind with a friend, the quiet of the waiting, the awakening of the woods, and the excitement of identifying wildlife sustain me.

The past 12 months have been tough for all of us, and for too many, devastating. Unsettling times often call upon us to reevaluate our priorities. It may be appropriate to reassess what it is that we truly value. Spending time outdoors with family, with friends, or with a good hunting dog—that's what I value and I suspect that you do too.

Looking back over the past year, it strikes me that heading out to my favorite stand of trees or catching up at the local hunt club are just what my mind and body need right about now. And the hope of donating all or part of a harvest to Hunters for the Hungry or, better yet, helping someone take the first steps in putting food on their own table by being a mentor through our Apprentice Hunting License program also appeals to my spirit. It may be that you share this need too—the need to get back to basics.

While it might not have pushed the tough headlines off the front page, the past year did bring some good news: record deer and bear harvests in Virginia, a good spring gobbler harvest, and a super hatch and turkey recruitment—which bodes well for the fall and the coming spring, especially. Bear have been spotted statewide and bear numbers are up, prompting a more liberal hunting season during 2009 and 2010. Waterfowl hunting looks good this fall, too. You'll want to check the current digest, as some bag limits have been raised accordingly.

So tune up your muzzleloader, bow, and long rifle and get ready to breathe in some fresh autumn air and take time for what really matters. Maybe I'll see you out there. Be safe.

Mission Statement

To manage Virginia's wildlife and inland fish to maintain optimum populations of all species to serve the needs of the Commonwealth; To provide opportunity for all to enjoy wildlife, inland fish, boating and related outdoor recreation and to work diligently to safeguard the rights of the people to hunt, fish and harvest game as provided for in the Constitution of Virginia; To promote safety for persons and property in connection with boating, hunting and fishing; To provide educational outreach programs and materials that foster an awareness of and appreciation for Virginia's fish and wildlife resources, their habitats, and hunting, fishing, and boating opportunities.

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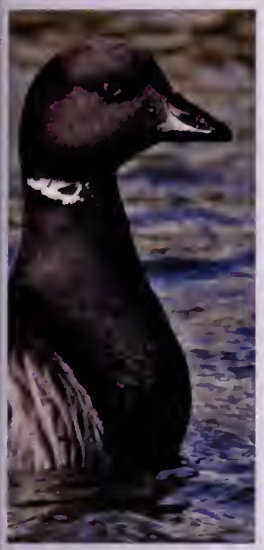
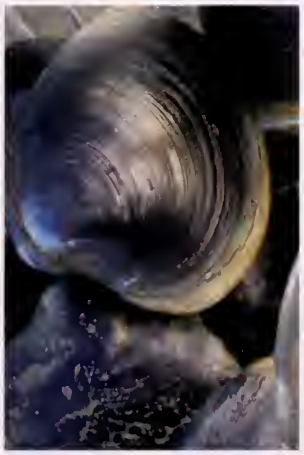


About the cover: Atlantic brant winter along Virginia's coastal regions and lower bay. Waterfowl hunters and birders pursue this duck throughout the barrier islands of the Eastern Shore. A good opportunity to view brant is during cold weather months from the the sandy reaches of Assateague National Wildlife Refuge. See related story on page 4.
©Ken Conger



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Clamming with Brant

And other gifts of the tidal flats

Eugene Hester

story and photos by Curtis Badger

I stand alone on the tidal flat with my head bowed, bent slightly at the waist. When I move, I do so with a shuffling gait… tentatively, a little uncertain of my direction. If someone were to see me from a distance, they would think that I am a very old man, perhaps infirm, perhaps confused.

But I am not infirm and I am not confused. What I am is hungry. I am hungry for clam chowder, and I want it made with salty seaside clams so fresh they were part of the coastal ecosystem the same day they are eaten. So I bend at the waist and scour the flat for clam sign, telltale holes that indicate a clam may be buried beneath the surface. I carry a clam pick, which is sort of a walking stick with two metal tines on one end, and when I spot a suspicious hole I rake the tines around it, hoping to make contact.

It is late winter, the perfect time to be out on Virginia's seaside. The duck hunters are gone and the flounder fishermen are still weeks away, and so I have the place to myself. It is low tide and acres of flats will be exposed for perhaps two hours, plenty of time to fill my basket with clams. It's feeding time out here. A pair of greater yellowlegs forages along the waters' edge ahead of me. A large flock of dunlin remains farther out on the flat, now and then taking off and flying a short distance, keeping in formation like a school of small fish.

In the shallows just off the flat is a raft of brant, *Branta bernicla*, a bird that captures the wildness and remoteness of this salt marsh in winter. The brant is a dark, stocky sea goose with a black head, neck, and breast, with whitish hashmarks on the sides of the neck. Its flanks are gray-brown and its rump is white. It simply looks right here in the winter marsh. The flanks are the color of decaying *Spartina* grass, the breast and neck are dark like the exposed flat, and the rump could be a chunk of salt ice pushed up during a hard freeze.

Clamming in winter is a good excuse to get out and listen to a little brant music.

Virginia has long enjoyed a fine reputation for its hardshell clam, Mercenaria mercenaria. *Tender little necks are enjoyed steamed, dipped in butter.*

Brant seem fitting and proper here in winter, especially if the sky is gray and there's a breeze carrying a promise of snow. Then the brant will hang along the horizon in dark, irregular strings, flying low over the bays that separate the barrier islands from the mainland. If they come upon a group of fellow brant feeding in the shallows, they will circle and come upwind, cup their wings, reduce speed, and fall gracefully one by one, barking like hungry puppies in a brant greeting.

The brant's high-pitched call also seems appropriate in this winter marsh. It is a feminine version of the call of the Canada goose, softer, gentler, more melodic, and—to my ear—much wilder. Unlike Canada geese, brant don't associate with people. You won't find them on the golf course or the neighborhood pond. If you want to see and hear brant, you'll have to get out here—in this remote landscape—in weather that encourages sane people to stay at home by the fire. And that adds to their wildness quotient, I think; they belong here in this singular place, a remote and not easily accessible landscape.

Clamming in winter is a good excuse to get out and listen to a little brant music. On a raw day in February, it's difficult to explain to your family that you want to take the boat out and listen to the brant. Instead, I put it in terms of clams: "Some hot clam chowder sure would be good on a day like today."

And so I pull on the thermals, the wool sweater, the waterproof jacket, and head out. The tidal flat is only a fifteen-minute run from the boat ramp, and that's the only chilly part of the trip. Once the boat is beached, once I'm on the flat, pecking at the surface with my clam pick, it no longer seems cold.

The hardshell clam we have here on the Virginia coast lives just below

the surface of the tidal flat, sending out two connected siphons to suck in nutrients and to expel waste. At low tide when the flat is exposed, the holes where the siphons appear can sometimes be seen. The term explaining this is "clam sign," which can be both a noun and a verb; for example, "The clams are signing good today." Rake your clam pick across these holes and you just might have the beginning of a pot of chowder.

Clams have been part of our food culture for hundreds of years, and they were once part of our currency. Native Americans used to eat the clam and then shape the shell into beads and trade them to other tribes for goods such as stone tools. Remember old gangster movies when a tough guy would thumb through a fistful of money and mutter, "Dat's a lotta clams?" He was talking about money, of course, and it all began here on the coast when an enterprising native discovered that people fancied handsome blue beads shaped from the clam shell. So clam shells became wampum, and when early scientists assigned genus and species names to clams, the hard clam of our coast, the source of wampum, was named *Mercenaria mercenaria*, from the Latin *mercenarius*, meaning money, or wages.

The value of the clam today, of course, is derived from its salty sweet flavor. We eat the tender, small ones—little necks—steamed open and dipped in melted butter. The larger ones are chopped up and made into fritters, or seasoned with garlic and served over pasta, or we use them as the mother ingredient in chowders.

The most variable clam dish by far is clam chowder. There are infinite versions along Virginia's coast, some from recipes centuries old, many that are considered family heirlooms. There is a popular notion, probably perpetuated by the companies that sell canned clam chowder, that there are two kinds of chowder: New England, which is creamy, and Manhattan, which is tomato based.

Those of us who live on the coast can sometimes be clam snobs, and we would be disinclined to eat a clam that came from anywhere near Manhattan. We're used to having clam dishes made with freshly caught *Mercenaria*. If we travel inland a bit and find clam chowder on the menu, we realize that it's made with sea clams, *Spisula solidissima*, or the ocean clam, *Arctica islandic*. These are large clams that live in offshore waters. They are dredged by ocean-going vessels, shipped to mainland processing plants, and then frozen and sent to food processors. This is a little like comparing freshly caught native trout with fish sticks at the drive-through.

I do not mean to disparage offshore clams, and I realize that *Mercenaria* are difficult to come by in, let's say, Big Stone Gap, and I would not want to deny the folks of Big Stone Gap their processed strips and chowder at the Friday evening seafood buffet. I wish, however, that I could favor each of them with a dozen little necks with butter, followed by a bowl of chowder made with clams taken from a tidal flat about an hour before dinner. □

Curtis Badger, whose most recent book is A Natural History of Quiet Waters *(UVA Press), has written widely about natural history and wildlife art. He lives on Virginia's Eastern Shore.*

Strivi

Knowledge about farming, forestry, and deer biology is key.

by Tee Clarkson

Background and left ©Tommy Kirkland

Today, deer management objectives have changed to control and stabilize populations over much of Virginia.

The ethics surrounding man's relationship with his environment over the last several hundred years have been brought into question on countless stages and in countless arenas. With so many voices now arguing the appropriate way we must interact with the natural world, it seems doubtful that a common agreement will ever be reached. But the central questions remain the same: Can we humans live in harmony with our surroundings? And if we can, how do we go about doing so?

While the idea can be daunting to contemplate on a global scale, at a local level good practices are easier to understand and to implement. As far as protecting wildlife, hunters make up one of the largest groups generally focused on the success of many species. They tend to look first at improving the health of their quarry in a localized area, which invariably has benefits that reach far outside a single species and a given location. For many years the Quality Deer Management Association (QDMA) has aimed to create a better relationship between deer, land, and humans in order to ensure the healthiest deer herd possible, but their practices benefit far more than deer alone.

The idea for quality deer management began in Texas in the 1960s. When wildlife biologists Al Brothers and Murphy Ray, Jr. published their book *Producing Quality Whitetails,* in 1975, the idea of managing deer herds gained momentum and began spreading to the rest of the whitetail's habitat throughout the country. By the turn of the millennium, hunters, biologists, and foresters were managing millions of acres based on Quality Deer Management (QDM) practices.

The basic tenet behind Quality Deer Management is "... aimed at creating the maximum nutritional value on a given piece of property," says Brandon Stevens, past president and active member of the Tri-City branch of the QDMA in Bristol, Virginia. Managing a deer herd properly and according to the QDM standards requires knowledge of forestry and farming practices as well as an understanding of the deer themselves. Essentially, a property can support a certain number of healthy deer. Often, though, the property holds more deer than it can technically support, leaving the herd less than healthy. This means smaller animals and animals that are in less than ideal shape.

©Tommy Kirkland

Fall is the mating season for whitetails, commonly called the "rut" by deer hunters, and the time of year when deer are most active.

ng for a Healthier Herd

Quality deer management often advocates for the harvesting of does over bucks, to achieve a healthy buck-to-doe ratio.

"The QDMA is based in education," says Stevens, "focusing on proper methods to achieve a healthier deer herd." The education starts with identifying herd size and the buck-to-doe ratio on a given piece of property. Herd size can be difficult to determine. The best tool for identifying the population and general health of the deer herd one wishes to manage is the Department's Deer Management Assistance Program, or DMAP.

"This is an excellent tool if you're going the QDM route," says district biologist Bill Bassinger. The program requires a meeting between landowners or managers and biologists, wherein they identify how to begin the process of improving the specific deer herd. During the first year, program participants provide data from harvested animals in the form of jawbones, weights, and antler measurements. These allow the scientists to determine the general health of the deer population on the property. From this information, biologists provide suggestions on management for the following year. Program participants continue to provide data from harvested animals in subsequent years, so the participant and scientist can identify how the management is progressing.

"The beauty of the program," says Bassinger, "is that you can track change in the herd over the years."

As for buck-to-doe ratio, "While a one-to-one ratio might be ideal," according to Stevens, "it is simply not realistic in most cases. A two-to-one or even three-to-one ratio is more achievable." For hunters on a piece of property going into the QDM program, this often means harvesting a lot of does for a few years and letting young bucks, those under two and a half years, walk. The implementation of this type of harvest management is crucial to achieving the ideal herd size and should come before land management practices even begin, in a lot of cases. The tough part in many areas of the state is having enough doe days or tags to harvest the required or necessary number of does. Again, this is where the DMAP provides huge assistance. If biologists determine a participant needs to thin out the doe population, they allot additional antlerless tags for the coming year.

"You need less deer to have healthier deer," says Bassinger, adding, "The beautiful tool of DMAP

is that it lets landowners take many more does."

The allotment of additional antlerless tags through DMAP generally includes taking does on any day throughout the season, and often allows hunters to take as many does as is deemed necessary to improve the health of the herd.

It is important to note that QDMA's practices are not as much trophy management practices as they are healthy management practices. Bigger bucks, however, are a byproduct of the system. If a property has healthier bucks, those bucks are going to have bigger racks. If a property has a better buck-to-doe ratio through letting young bucks walk, eventually hunters will see more and bigger bucks. Adding a trophy element to the program is as easy as understanding buck age structure and simply not shooting bucks under a certain age.

"As a general rule," Stevens says, "it is best not to shoot bucks under two and a half years old."

Because of this, identifying buck age in the field is a major part of QDMA's educational focus. The age can be raised to three and a half, however, in order to focus more on growing trophy bucks. "It's a personal choice," Stevens notes.

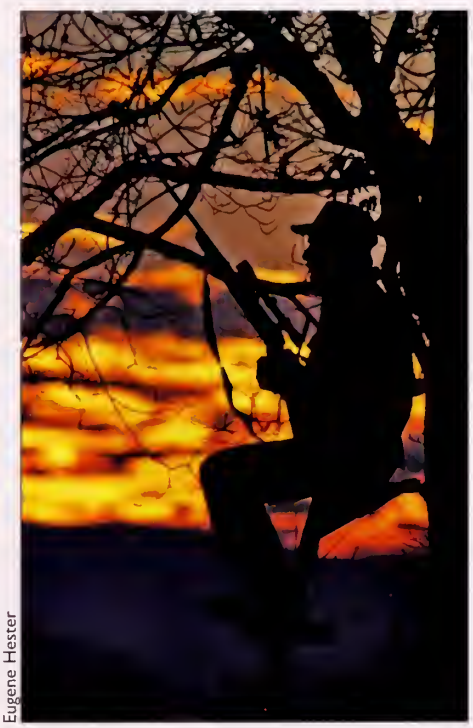
Dwight Dyke

Wildlife biologist Al Bourgeois discusses deer management objectives with landowners and how the science of aging deer is based on tooth development and wear.

For hunters on a piece of property going into the QDM program, this often means harvesting a lot of does for a few years and letting young bucks, those under two and a half years, walk.

After harvest management, land management is the primary tool in creating and maintaining an ideal deer herd. The location and terrain of the property will dictate land and forest management practices. Those living in the western, more mountainous portion of the state may do well to focus on forest management—thinning trees to allow for more undergrowth, which benefits not only deer, but many species of animals and birds. Those to the east may likely want to incorporate food plots as a means of maximizing nutritional value. Consulting the Department of Forestry and DGIF biologists to determine the best practices is undoubtedly a good place to start.

When it comes to property size for management, Stevens says no property is really too small to manage, applying the QDM strategies. Sure, while it might be helpful to have a sizeable chunk of land in the hundreds of acres, Stevens says he has seen the practices work on parcels as small as 17 acres. "The ideal situation," he points out, "is to have adjacent landowners working together and implementing the same management strategies. This is a benefit to everyone."



Eugene Hester

Stevens is quick to acknowledge, though, that "... managing a deer herd for ideal conditions is not something that happens overnight." Like anything in life, the more you put into it, the more you get out," he professes. Often it takes three to five years to really start seeing the benefits of Quality Deer Management practices.

For those interested in exploring these strategies, the QDMA has 12 branches located around the state. Members share tactics, techniques, successes, and failures among the group. If you are looking to improve the health of your deer herd, this is a great place to start.

Tee Clarkson is an English teacher at Deep Run High School in Henrico Co. and runs Virginia Fishing Adventures, a fishing camp for kids: tsclarkson@virginiafishingadventures.com.

More extensive information regarding the Quality Deer Management Association and state branches can be found on the QDMA Web site: www.qdma.com.

Red Oak Quail

Take Flight

essay and photos by Gail Brown

Raising quail is hard work. Just ask Larry Newcomb of Red Oak, Virginia. Not too long ago he tore down his flight pens and scaled back his operation to the more owner-friendly side of the business—selling packing foam, supplies, and equipment to other would-be quail farmers. In the past, Newcomb sold nine different varieties of quail and shipped over 2,000 eggs a day to 48 states. When asked what went wrong with his family business that has spanned 25 years, Newcomb replies: "Success. We were too successful. I couldn't keep up."

More sales meant more incubators, more chicks, more eggs, more work. Regardless of the fact that the entire family pitched in, it was clean, feed, water, pack, transport—morning 'til night—then start all over again; the Sorcerer's Apprentice with an avian twist. The rising cost of feed (which doubled over the last five years), increasing costs for electricity (over $600 a month before firing up two large commercial incubators), and daunting problems with transportation were also factors in Newcomb's decision to scale things down. But in the final analysis, it was the unending toil that tipped the scales away from farming live quail to the lucrative (and easier) job of providing other farmers with supplies needed to run the same business.

Yet today, Newcomb is poised to restart the part of the business he loves the most—raising northern bobwhite quail, shipping eggs, and talking with customers who become friends when all is said and done. That this story crosses three generations and involves wild things and country values only serves to make the telling bittersweet. Here's what happened.

In 1985 Nathan Newcomb moved his family from Sewell, New Jersey, to the quiet fields of Red Oak, Virginia, close to his parent's homestead. To young Larry, Red Oak might as well have been on the moon. Alien also were the chickens his fa-

Packing eggs takes time and care; eggs (from left to right): pharaoh coturnix, northern bobwhite, and button quail.

Above: A neighbor created the sign for Larry Newcomb's family business; Larry's mom (absent) also helps out. Below: The male northern bobwhite quail has a white ring on his neck. The female has a brown ring.

ther asked him to raise. Knowing how animals can tie you to the land, Nathan purchased an incubator for his son. That Larry had only seen a chicken once, maybe twice, in his entire ten years didn't seem to matter. His experiences didn't include quail, either, but before long he was hatching and selling bobwhite quail to neighbors and passersby in ever-increasing numbers.

Like any proud father, Nathan couldn't resist a little bragging. Mornings found fellow farmers at S.T. Adams Country Store leaning in to hear about each challenge faced and each problem solved, day by day, egg by egg! When a local breeder sold the young entrepreneur 1,000 quail eggs the business simply took flight. By the time he reached high school, Newcomb had a thriving business, one that remains an important part of his life today as he looks to rebuild the wild side of quail farming.

In the future, Newcomb hopes his partnership with a neighbor who will raise pheasants will help him keep growth and costs manageable. When asked what advice he would give those new to the business, Newcomb is clear: "Get your licenses in order and follow the rules. Start small and specialize with one kind of bird. And grow slowly."

Asked about his lifelong attraction to bobwhite quail, Newcomb replies: "Just to hear them call across my fields—or to see them cross in front of me on the driveway—well, I can't say it any plainer than that." □

Gail Brown is a retired teacher and school administrator.

Lake Cohoon's

Suffolk's Lake Cohoon is a fantastic fishery worthy of a visit from families and serious fishing fans.

story and photos
by Marc N. McGlade

Some of the best lakes in Virginia are located near downtown Suffolk. Dubbed the Suffolk Lakes, these interconnected lakes are slightly west of Virginia's Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge. The lakes include Western Branch Reservoir, Lake Prince, Burnt Mills Reservoir, Speights Run, Lake Cohoon (sometimes spelled Cahoon), Lake Meade, Lake Kilby, and the Lone Star Lakes (a series of 12 lakes—some interconnected—varying in size from three to 50 acres, totaling 490 acres).

Suffolk is sandwiched between Virginia's incredible saltwater fishing to the east and Lake Gaston and Buggs Island to the west. Surprisingly, the Suffolk lakes can be overlooked, despite their top-heavy rankings when it comes to the Old Dominion's trophy fish certificates.

Lake Cohoon, Lake Meade, Lake Kilby, and Speights Run are water supply reservoirs owned by the city of Portsmouth but located in Suffolk. Lake Cohoon can lay claim to the current state-record bowfin. This giant dinosaur weighed 16 pounds, 8 ounces, and was caught by John Plyler, Jr. on October 17, 2004.

While the lakes provide drinking water to thousands of Virginians, they offer anglers a tremendous variety of fisheries from which to choose. Lake Cohoon is certainly one of them.

Lake Cohoon Specifics

Lake Cohoon measures 510 acres and is a dynamo for bluegill, largemouth bass, chain pickerel, crappie, and shellcracker. Fisheries biologists even stocked walleye from 1995 through 1998; however, moderate survival of these fingerlings did not justify additional stockings. The Department has duly noted Cohoon's production of monster-sized chain pickerel. Biologists say anglers catch several 6-pound "jacks" during wintertime. For that species, it is the top producer in the district. It is also one of the district's top-producing lakes for big crappie.

Bowfin Bonanza

Chad Boyce is a fisheries biologist from the Department's district office in Chesapeake who manages the fish factory. He says Lake Cohoon's water is a bit more stained when compared to similar lakes in the area, with a slightly lower pH.

"These are the makings for a great bowfin lake, as that fish prefers stained, acidic waters such as the swamps and creeks in the Nottoway and Blackwater rivers," he explains.

Page 14: Fisheries biologists Chad Boyce, left, and Eric Brittle, show evidence of Lake Cohoon's bruiser bowfin.
Above: Suffolk's Lake Cohoon is a scenic lake with bountiful and big fish.
Left: Chad Boyce takes measurements of a fat Lake Cohoon bowfin.

Lake Cohoon is one of the state's best chain pickerel fisheries.

Lake Cohoon Logistics

- For fisheries information and regulations regarding Lake Cohoon, contact the DGIF district office in Chesapeake at (757) 465-6812. For even more information, visit online at www.HuntFishVA.com.
- Gas motors as powerful as 9.9 horsepower are allowed.
- The Lake Meade & Cohoon Bait & Tackle Shop, located at 1805 Pitchkettle Road (off Route 58), provides a paved boat ramp for Lake Meade and Lake Cohoon, boat rentals, trolling motors, bait, tackle, beverages, and snacks. The concession is open only on weekends during winter months, but seven days a week otherwise, weather permitting. For more information, contact the concession by phone at (757) 539-6216.
- Bank fishing is limited to the shoreline at the fishing station, excluding the dam.
- A permit (daily or annual) from the city of Portsmouth is required for fishing or boating on its lakes (Cohoon, Meade, Kilby, and Speights Run). These permits can be purchased at the Lake Meade & Cohoon Bait & Tackle Shop or through the city's Lake Kilby Water Treatment Plant, phone (757) 539-2201, ext. 0.

"However, Cohoon is not as acidic as those backwater areas, but it still has great habitat for bowfin."

Boyce indicates Cohoon boasts great fishing for largemouth bass, pickerel, crappie, and sunfish, but also touts the large bowfin that roam the lake.

"Bowfin also like the cover provided by cypress trees, especially their 'knees' and root structure, which Cohoon has plenty of as well," he says. "Excellent forage and suitable habitat certainly contribute, too."

According to Boyce, however, bowfin are not the main draw for Cohoon. The Suffolk area is widely known for its amazing largemouth bass, sunfish, and crappie angling. At Lake Cohoon, these species garner the most attention. Chain pickerel fishing is outstanding from late winter to early spring at this Coastal Plain beauty. In fact, Lake Cohoon is one of the best chain pickerel fisheries in the entire state.

Bruiser Bowfin

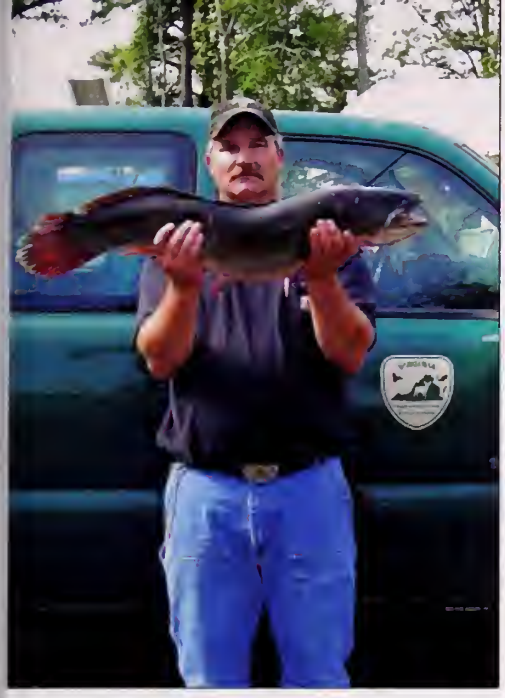
Bowfin *(Amia calva)* have many nicknames. They include mudfish, grinnel, grinner, dogfish, grindle, and blackfish. Few anglers purposely target these incredible game fish; rather, in the South bowfin likely get hooked as a result of people fishing for largemouth bass. They are as strong as a pit bull and won't give up, even when in the landing net! Bowfin are known to destroy fishing tackle—primarily spinnerbaits—with their slashing teeth.

These prehistoric creatures lurk in muddy or weedy habitats. Still-water areas are likely to hold the round-tailed specimens, not to be confused with the northern snakehead fish—although they do exhibit some physical similarities. Northern snakeheads at present are confined to the Potomac River drainage area.

Boyce believes another state-record bowfin could be lurking in the scenic lake. He says the largest bowfin the Department has sampled to date weighed in the 12-pound range. He contends that Cohoon is a great place to fish for a big bowfin, especially in the upper reaches of the lake in the shallows.

"Some big crappie come out of Cohoon each year, too, but a state record would probably be unlikely," he adds.

Top: Where there are baby chain pickerel, there are giants.
Above: Giant shellcrackers are common at Lake Cohoon.



John Plyler, Jr.'s bowfin of 16 pounds, 8 ounces has held the state record since Oct. 17, 2004.

Eric Brittle scoops up some Lake Cohoon fish from the Department's sampling boat.

A Don't-Miss Lake

Boyce acknowledges that diehard bowfin anglers are a rare breed, and the truth is the majority of fishermen don't want to deal with an angry one in the boat. True, they don a mug only a mama fish could love, but they are among the gamest of fighters in all of fresh water.

"Most anglers typically are disgusted when they hook one," he jokes. "I've never really figured that one out, as the majority of bass anglers are looking for a hard fight, big fish, and ultimately a release. Why not tie on a short steel leader and target bowfin in the lake when the bass are not biting?"

Lake Cohoon is one lake anglers should visit. It's a beautiful lake with much more to offer than bowfin. Do yourself a favor and venture to Suffolk to try to catch some of the willing species this lake has to share. Its geographic location in the commonwealth makes it a 12-month fishery, and there is a lot to be said about that when Old Man Winter rears his head.

Fisheries biologist Chad Boyce hefts a beautiful Lake Cohoon largemouth bass.

Marc N. McGlade is a writer and photographer from Midlothian, who relishes the opportunity to venture to Suffolk to fish any of the Suffolk lakes.

Hunting for

How to establish and keep hunting access on private land

by Bruce Ingram

I am often amazed at how many hunters whine about not having private land to hunt in the state. I know that habitat loss is a terrible threat (indeed, the most prominent threat) to hunting's future, but I also know that plenty of landowners will let someone hunt if the individual only asks and agrees to follow all instructions. I live in Botetourt County, and in that county as well as in Craig, Roanoke, and Franklin I have permission to hunt some 15 different farms.

Consider how I recently gained permission to hunt several of those parcels. In July at a meeting of local landowners, a Roanoke County gentleman approached me and began talking about the damage deer had been doing to his landscaping. I quickly mentioned how much I enjoy deer hunting. His response: "Would you mind coming over and hunting this fall?" Interestingly, the landowner's only stipulation was that I not shoot any bear or turkeys—something that I readily agreed to.

©Dwight Dyke

harvested before I had time to go afield on her land.

A Franklin County landowner said that I could hunt his farm only if I let walk any buck with fewer than eight points and concentrated on shooting does—two stipulations that I eagerly agreed to.

When and How to Ask

From my experience, July and August are the best months to ask a landowner for permission. The later in the season that one asks, the greater the likelihood that other individuals may have been granted access, and the property owner may be unwilling to let more hunters go afield. Also, September is peak harvest time for many farmers and obviously it's unwise to interrupt them then when they are so busy.

When meeting a landowner for the first time either at his front door or on his farm, the first thing I do is identify myself and present my driver's license. Then I inform him that I am a high school English teacher in Botetourt County and live outside of Fincastle. Thus, the landowner immediately sees a legal document stating who I am, knows what I do for a living, and knows where I live.

Don't waste an individual's time, however, talking about crops, cattle, or the weather. The landowner has already probably guessed what you are there for and will respect the direct approach.

After a quick introduction, this is what I say: "Look, I'll come straight to the point. I drove by your farm and saw your fields and woodlots. Would you mind if I come over this fall and hunt turkeys with my shotgun?"

This is a simple and straightforward approach. I usually find that landowners are much more likely to let me pursue turkeys than deer and also seem more comfortable that I will only be carrying a scattergun instead of a rifle. This is particularly true for individuals who possess livestock.

The next part of the conversation usually proceeds in this manner: If the landowner rejects my request, I do not try to change his mind. Instead, I thank him for his time and, while

Eugene Hester

Permission

Right before the 2007 season began, a Botetourt County lady called and said that she heard I enjoy hunting and asked if I would like to do so on her farm. She had two stipulations. Her husband was experiencing health problems and could not eat meat with high fat content. Could I give her the liver of any deer that I killed (the husband relishes liver and onions) and a few venison steaks from time to time? As a gesture of appreciation I brought the lady the livers of several deer that I

©Bruce Ingram

Using a simple, straightforward approach and respecting a landowner's time will go a long way in discussions about gaining hunting access to private land.

leaving, ask him if he knows of any neighbors who might allow me to hunt. Recently, for example, a landowner refused to let me hunt, but upon my asking about adjacent property owners, he gave me the name of a neighbor who granted me permission to do so.

If the landowner grants permission, I ask him if he has the time to physically show me the boundaries. I tell him that I know he is busy but that I am very worried about blundering off his property and onto a neighbor's land. I have never had a landowner refuse to do this, as I think people sincerely respect a hunter's desire not to trespass by accident. While the two of us drive or walk across the property, I ask him if he is having any trouble with deer damage. If he says "yes," I ask him if he might consider letting me bowhunt on his place, too, and target does.

By this point, the landowner has usually formed an impression of me. If he responds that he would rather me not hunt his deer, I immediately drop the matter. But on quite a few occasions after I have turkey hunted on a property a few times, I have had landowners invite me to come back and bow or gun hunt.

Respecting Landowner Preferences

The next step in this budding relationship is for me to ascertain his preferences about how and when I should contact him or come onto his holdings. Consider these preferences regarding places where I have permission to hunt.

One Botetourt County landowner never wants me to call him before I come. "Come anytime, but let me know when you shoot something," is his common refrain.

A different Botetourt County property owner requests that I call her in early September every year to "be put on the calendar." I share the hunting rights with three other individuals and she creates a calendar where only one of us at a time can be afield on her place on any particular day.

Yet another Botetourt farmer wants me to leave a message on his answering machine a few days before I plan to hunt.

One Botetourt landowner doesn't care what I hunt for or with, as long as I don't bring a bow onto his place. Apparently, a number of years ago a bowhunter shot and missed a deer and wasn't able to locate the arrow, which the farmer eventually found in his cattle pasture. Bowhunting has been banned ever since.

The point is that a good sportsman should strive to know and strictly adhere to a landowner's preferences.

For many years, I have followed two traditions regarding landowners who have granted me permission. First, after I have gained access, I always bring one of my wife's homemade loaves of sourdough, zucchini, or banana nut bread as a present. And after I have killed a deer or a turkey, I bring a loaf to the farmer. A few landowners even call and ask when I am coming again, so that they might have a shot (no pun intended) at more of Elaine's baked goods. These property owners know of my tradition and appreciate it.

Dwight Dyke

What Angers Landowners About Hunters

While writing this story, I contacted several landowners and asked them what hunters do that makes them angry. Here are some of their responses:

- "One guy had the nerve to ask for permission on the first day of deer season," one said. "That's just rude."
- "I hate it when hunters trespass on my place," another told me. "I'm one of those city slickers that moved to the country. I don't know a thing about deer or deer hunting, but I know that I have too many deer on my place, and I know that they are eating my wife's ornamentals. If someone will just ask for permission, chances are pretty good I will say yes."
- "These three guys said they would shoot some of my does, which is what I wanted. But when I came over to check on them, they had two small bucks. I'll let them finish out this year, but when they call next fall and ask for permission, I'll turn them down."
- "I have told and told people not to park inside my red gate. But this one guy keeps doing it anyway. If it keeps up, I'm running everybody off."
- "Don't people know not to drive across a wet field?"

Many things can happen to cause hunters to lose hunting access, such as property being divided up, developed, or sold. But if we follow the guidelines that a property owner has set, act courteously, and use common sense, hunters can reap the benefits of having permission to go afield on prime private land until that day comes. □

Bruce Ingram is the author of The James River Guide, The New River Guide, *and* The Shenandoah/Rappahannock Rivers Guide. Contact him at *be_ingram@juno.com.*

Dwight Dyke

VDHA Youth Hunt

essay and photos
by Ken Perrotte

Only a couple of deer made it home with the 15 young hunters assembled at Kinloch Farm in Essex County for the 4th Annual Youth Hunt of the Fredericksburg/Northern Neck Chapter of the Virginia Deer Hunters Association (VDHA), but the day's memories weren't measured by pounds of venison.

Most of the youngsters were fresh out of a hunter education course and just learning how to wield a shotgun in a hunting situation. Under the close supervision of adult relatives and mentors, they enjoyed the outdoors camaraderie and their first deer hunting experiences.

The hosts for the hunt, Bruce Lee and his fellow members of the Pinehill Hunt Club, used well-trained bird dogs and man drives to encourage deer movement for the youngsters.

At the noon break for an ample buffet and warm-up, Lee asked for a show of hands as to how many deer were being seen. "How many have seen three deer? Five deer? Ten or more deer?" he asked.

Hands enthusiastically shot upward. Clearly, the kids were seeing lots of deer and getting shots. But, they were also learning the importance of shooting skill and timing

Left: Dillon, 10, stands at the ready in a creek bottom, facing the lengthening shadows of the afternoon.

Jesse Magill helps son Jake, 12, load shells into his 12 gauge shotgun.

when it comes to putting venison in the cooler.

Chapter President Matt Lafley said costs for the hunt are funded by the chapter's annual fall banquet. Lee donates use of the farm. He practices a Quality Deer Management approach to the 1,485-acre property. The youth hunt is a management event where only antlerless deer are supposed to be taken.

Twelve-year-old Jake Magill was one of the lucky hunters, taking his first deer ever.

"You'll never forget this day," his father, Jesse, said—placing a hand on his son's shoulder. □

Outdoors columnist Ken Perrotte of King George says that getting kids off the couch and into the woods or on the water is part of his life's mission.

Above: Young hunters and their adult supervisors assemble on a trail at Kinloch Farm following the end of a morning deer drive. Below: Hunters and guides round up the well-trained bird dogs used to motivate deer movement during the hunt.

Be Wild! Live Wild! G

Virginia's B

Red-winged Blackbird chasing Cowbird

story and illustrations by Spike Knuth

The New World blackbird family, Icteridae, is made up of birds with a variety of habits that live in a variety of habitats. They build a variety of nest types; some elaborate and some in colonies. One doesn't build a nest at all. Color-wise, many are all black but with a metallic gloss of blue, purple, green, and bronze. The females of these are a somber brown. Some have colors of bright orange, yellow, and red. Most of them do not make musical songs or calls and have long, slender, pointed bills. Many of them fly together in large flocks during fall and have not endeared themselves to the agricultural community because of the crop damage they cause.

Red-winged Blackbird
(Agelaius phoeniceus)

Redwings show a definite affinity to marshes, sloughs, and swales. To attract females the all-black male will perch atop an old cattail stalk, display his red shoulder epaulets, droop his wings, and spread his tail in sync with his song, described as "konk-a-reee." Redwings are the most numerous of all blackbirds. Once they were associated only with cattail and willow marshes, but they have adapted to nesting in brush, shrubs, and trees away from big water. Loose groups will nest in the smaller marshy sloughs or in wet meadows. A single male mates with an average of 5 females, which produce up to three broods each (but rare) during a single breeding season. In fall, they gather in large flocks along with other blackbirds as well as flocks of their own kind, flying in tight, noisy formations.

row Wild!

lackbirds

Common Grackle
(Quiscalus quiscula)

The common grackle measures about a foot long. The male is all black, but during breeding displays an iridescent sheen of green, blue, bronze, or purple. It has a long tail that can be folded vertically, giving it a V-shaped appearance and making it look tail-heavy in flight. Females are smaller, with a shorter tail, and have only a little iridescence on the forepart of their body. As spring nears they get very noisy. The males, especially, utter harsh metallic squawks and squeaks as they display for the females. They exhibit a definite preference for conifers and, like many other blackbirds, nest in loose colonies. They are aggressive and will attack and give chase to crows and hawks that venture through their airspace. Flocking begins by late June, as they rove croplands and roost in tall trees at night. Their fall flights can be quite spectacular, as they fly in ribbon-like flocks sometimes several miles long either returning from feeding forays or migrating.

Boat-tailed Grackle
(Quiscalus major)

The boat-tailed grackle is a bird of brackish marshes and islands. The most common of its raucous calls is the quick, harsh, "jeeb-jeeb-jeeb." They commonly feed on sandy beaches, mudflats at low tide, or along marsh edges, as well as roadsides, cultivated fields, and parking lots. Males measure about 16 inches and are glossy black-violet on the head, to deep blue or even blue-green on breast and back, iridescent in the sun. Females are much smaller, with dull, dark brown backs and light brown undersides and a white throat.

Boat-tails nest from April through June in groups or colonies in live oaks, water oaks, wax myrtles, and other marsh vegetation. They feed on aquatic and terrestrial insects, crustaceans, amphibians, mussels, worms, eggs of horseshoe crabs, and some fruits.

Common Grackle

Boat-tailed Grackle

Brown-headed Cowbird

Brewer's Blackbird

Brown-headed Cowbird
(Molothrus ater)

Cowbirds were once found primarily in the short grass prairies of the Great Plains but have moved their range eastward. The male is blue-black with a brown head, while the female is a plain gray-brown. Cowbirds have a short, thick bill suitable for eating seeds as well as insects. These birds roam about all year in small groups. In spring it might be 5 or 6 males along with a single female. Cowbirds don't build a nest, but seek out the nests of others for egg laying. A single female may lay up to 40 eggs during an 8-week breeding season. Because of a short 11- to 12-day incubation period, young cowbirds hatch first and out-compete the young of the smaller host species, even killing them in some instances. Some species detect the unusual egg and move it out of the nest or will build a new nest over the old one.

Brewer's Blackbird
(Euphagus cyanocephalus)

Brewer's blackbirds resemble the grackles but are not as large. The male is basically black, with head and neck showing a glossy purple to blue in spring and more solid black in fall. Females are a brown-slate color. In the Midwest they breed mainly in the northern states up into Canada, nesting in grassy meadows and trees around lakes and rivers. In Virginia they are most apt to be seen during fall migration and often go unnoticed because of their similarity to grackles. They will flock up either together or in mixed flocks in fall and winter. In recent years they have been moving their range eastward.

Rusty Blackbird
(Euphagus carolinus)

The rusty blackbird is an early spring and late fall migrant through Virginia. It breeds mostly north of the United States into Canada, up to the Arctic coasts. Rusty blackbirds tend to inhabit forests more so than other blackbird species and are drawn to swamps, wooded lakeshores, and forest streams. The male in spring is basically all black, with females being a duller slate color. In winter, they are similar but the black feathers are edged with rusty brown to give them a brown-gray appearance. During fall they will be found along waters as they migrate, walking and wading in the water and communicating with each other with a constant chuckling, gurgling call interspersed with squeaky notes. When interrupted they'll flush in unison, much like a flock of shorebirds. They tend to migrate in small flocks of their own kind to winter. Populations have been declining for unknown reasons.

Rusty Blackbird

Bobolink

Bobolink
(Dolichonyx oryzivorus)

The adult male bobolink in spring has one of the most unique color patterns, with lighter colors above and black lower parts. It shows a buff-colored hind neck, with white shoulders, back, rump, and upper tail coverts. The female is light buff-olive below, with streaked flanks and two brown stripes over its head. Come fall, the male takes on similar but richer colors. Bobolinks are a common transient across Virginia but breed in a few, select locations. Bobolinks favor large grassy fields, especially of hay, alfalfa, and wheat, as well as dry brushy marshes and fallow fields. As with all blackbirds, they begin to gather in flocks as early as late July to begin their migration. They migrate out over the ocean to South America south of the Equator as far as Argentina and Paraguay, a distance of 6,000 miles! This is another blackbird considered a pest due to its affinity for rice. Early mowing of hay and alfalfa fields in the East destroyed their nesting attempts, resulting in a population decline.

Eastern Meadowlark
(Sturnella magna)

The eastern meadowlark is a bird of the open fields. Its spring song is delivered from atop a post or stump or from the ground with head up, pointing skyward. It's a stocky, short-tailed bird with a long bill and is best identified by its lemon yellow breast with a distinctive black V on its chest and a striped head. It has a chicken-like walk with a habit of flicking and fanning its tail, and shows white outer tail feathers when it flies. Nests are grassy structures built in slight depressions in older, flattened vegetation amid dense clumps of grasses and are covered by arching growths of taller grasses. Parent birds don't fly directly to or away from the nest, in order to hide its location. In some cases, they leave a matted down trail to the nest, due to their many comings and goings. Many winter in Virginia throughout the Coastal Plain of the lower James River to the North-

Eastern Meadowlark

ern Neck, an area south of Virginia Beach, and the Eastern Shore. Meadowlark populations are declining due to clean farming practices and loss of hedgerows.

Baltimore Oriole
(Icterus galbula)

Baltimore orioles favor larger trees in parks, residential areas, and along country roads and rivers. They seem to prefer elms but will be found in other, large deciduous trees and fruit orchards. Females arrive after the males to the same general area where they nested during the previous year.

One of this bird's most outstanding characteristics is its nest. The female anchors and suspends it with a foundation of strong fibrous materials; then, expertly weaves plant fibers and animal hair to form a hanging pocket four to six inches deep. It is not only a work of art but durable, often lasting two or three years. It is rarely, if ever, used again. Baltimore orioles have one brood, and once the family is fledged, they leave the breeding area and go into dense woods or swamps. From late August and into September they begin meandering southward, with some wintering along the South Atlantic and Gulf coasts.

Baltimore Oriole

Orchard Oriole
(Icterus spurius)

This is the smallest of the orioles. Its fore and upper parts, wings, and tail are black, and underparts and rump, chestnut with a narrow wing bar. The female is yellowish or olive-green above, darker on the back, more yellow on the rump, with dusky wings that have two wing bars. Young males are similar to the female but the cheeks, chin, and throat are black and it will take three years for it to attain full adult plumage. So different is their plumage that it was once thought to be a separate species.

The song of the orchard oriole is a loud warbling, often sung on the wing, and it has a whistled call. Orchard orioles are probably not numerous but are common all over Virginia. They favor areas with scattered trees or orchards along streams and roads, often nesting close together in a loose colony. The nest is a hanging basket-like affair woven of green grasses and plant down and suspended in a forked branch 10 to 20 feet up. They leave us in September to winter from southern Mexico south to northern Columbia. □

Orchard Oriole

Spike Knuth is an avid naturalist and wildlife artist. For over 30 years his artwork and writing have appeared in Virginia Wildlife. *He is a member of the Virginia Outdoor Writers Association.*

Be Wild! Live Wild! Grow Wild! is a regular feature that highlights Virginia's Wildlife Action Plan, which is designed to unite natural resources agencies, sportsmen and women, conservationists, and citizens in a common vision for the conservation of the Commonwealth's wildlife and habitats in which they live. To learn more or to become involved with this program visit: www.bewildvirginia.org.

No creatures on this earth bring more smiles to humans than a new litter of puppies. Puppies. It's a word that goes right to the human brain and seems to always produce a smile. Why, we are so adorable as babies we have been used by ad agencies around the world to sell everything from skin lotion to automobiles to insect repellent. If you find there is a void in your life, take home a puppy and it will fill your days with loyalty, laughter, and love. After all, who's ever heard the expression, "kitten love"?

I admit that puppy love has a connotation of "something that humans may not see as lasting." But dogs don't see it that way, because once the bond is formed, it is pretty much there for good. If you take us home, we plan on being around for ten years or more! So I thought I would make some suggestions which will make life easier for the both of us.

When picking a puppy partner for companionship or for hunting, you want to do some research. Try not to be taken in by our big brown puppy eyes and look carefully at our breeding. Dogs, just like humans, are a mixture of various cultures, so try to learn as much as possible about a pup's background. Some dogs need a great deal of exercise and attention and could get rather bored if left alone a lot. These breeds may not make the best house dogs. You might regret leaving a pair of your favorite new leather boots on the floor, for example. Other breeds may have a tendency to be noisy or bark like an overwrought in-law for incessant periods of time. One of these breeds might make the perfect choice if you live alone, or are elderly, or want to know if someone is now on your dog's turf.

Any old time you want to bring love into your life is a good time to acquire a pup. But if you want a practical tip, my suggestion would be to do so in the spring—preferably when the kids are home on school break. This allows plenty of time for everyone to get to know each other, because puppies need to bond to something after leaving their litters. Also, puppies are noted for sleeping, eating, and reading newspapers. So if the new member of the house is in house-breaking mode, it would make things easier for all concerned that, when the time comes to go outside, neither of you is doing so during a freezing rain or when there's six inches of snow on the ground.

When faced with so much cuteness in a puppy litter, it may be hard for you to choose. There are a number of tests you can do with a pup to explore its dominance, shyness, or strong will, so take your time. If you have done your homework, you may get just the pup that fits your personality. But if you just want a dog for a companion, you can probably forgo the entire scientific selection process and just reach down and grab the first one that licks your hand.

The next best investment you can make after getting a pup is to enroll both of you in an obedience class. This creates a structure for you and the pup and, provided you spend the proper time in training, your puppy learns rather quickly what is expected of it. Teaching your pup to obey three simple commands—come, sit, and stay—makes things a lot easier around the house. Plus, if there is car traffic nearby, it could save your pup's life.

Remember, puppies, unlike your teenager, are comfortable when they learn that you are the one with the authority. As that famous guy, Gene Hill, once said, "Dogs sleep so much because they love so hard."

Keep a leg up,
Luke

Luke is a black Labrador retriever who spends his spare time hunting up good stories with his best friend, Clarke C. Jones. You can contact Luke and Clarke at www.clarkecjones.com.

VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

Photo Contest Reminder

The deadline for submitting photographs for the 2009 *Virginia Wildlife* Photography Contest is **November 2, 2009**. Winning photographs will appear in the special March 2010 issue of the magazine. For more information about the contest and to view last year's edition online, visit the Department's Web site at: **http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/photocontest**.

Journal

2009 Outdoor Calendar of Events

Unless otherwise noted, for current information and registration on workshops go to the "Upcoming Events" page on our Web site at www.HuntFishVA.com or call 804-367-7800.

October 6: *Kayak Fishing Workshop*, Beaverdam Park in Gloucester.

October 17: *Youth Fall Turkey Hunt*, ages 15 and younger.

October 23: *Virginia Wildlife and Birding Trail 5th Anniversary Celebration*, Virginia Creeper Trail Park, Abingdon. Contact Jeff Trollinger at jeff.trollinger@dgif.virginia.gov for more information.

October 24: *Youth Waterfowl Hunting Day*, ages 15 and under.

November 7: *Virginia Wildlife and Birding Trail 5th Anniversary Celebration*, "The Link," 12018 Lee Hwy., Sperryville, Abingdon, 8:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m. Contact Jeff Trollinger at jeff.trollinger@dgif.virginia.gov for more information.

November 7: *Shenandoah Audubon's 9th Birding Festival*, Jim Barnett Park, Winchester. Contact Judy Hagan at hagansan@yahoo.com for more information. □

Lifetime Licenses

Open the door to a lifetime of enjoyment in the great outdoors of Virginia with a lifetime freshwater fishing, hunting or trout license!

It's an investment that keeps on giving. For more information visit:

http://www.HuntFishVA.com/forms/lifetime_licenses/instructions.html

or call 1- (866) 721-6911

by Beth Hester

Autumn Shadows: Outdoor Tales of the Supernatural
by Joel M. Vance
2002 Bonasa Press
Limited edition, signed by author and illustrators
www.bonasapress.com
717-684-4215

"A good ghost story has sounds in the night, unexplained deep cold, and shimmering visitations. Chains clank, and there are footsteps where no person is…"
–Joel Vance

Perhaps one of the most treasured outdoor traditions is the sharing of hair-raising ghost stories. Told "sotto voce" (in a low, quiet voice) around a crackling camp fire, these yarns of suspense and foreboding never cease to satisfy: Phantom Civil War battles take place in familiar woods; bereaved widows return to haunt dilapidated Victorian mansions; and courting teenage couples return home from a tryst to discover the hooked claw of an amputee felon attached to the car's door handle.

Author Joel Vance carries on this tradition of classic supernatural tales with a twist. His stories are narrated by hunters and anglers, and as a collection, they make for entertaining reading just perfect for Halloween. Vance's tales are not filled with cinematic blood and gore, but they are filled with the tang of autumn woods, the wandering spirits of old hunters, and the specters of their loyal but long-dead gun dogs. Fishing guides are commissioned by dead anglers who, in life, never caught the "big one," and there are quirky demons who resemble David Niven… who could ask for more?

This handsome volume also contains color plates, and black and white illustrations that serve as a nice accompaniment to the stories. Take this durable volume on your next camping trip to add a little frisson of fear as your campers nibble their marshmallows and graham crackers.

So, Happy Halloween … and as we say in the South, "Boo y'all!" □

Report Wildlife Violations
1-800-237-5712

Coordinator of the boating education volunteer program Robert N. "Bob" Swinson (C) was recently honored. The Board of Game and Inland Fisheries recognized him for being named the recipient of the 2009 Governor's Transportation Safety Award, for his contributions to improving safety for swimmers, boaters, and anglers. For almost 60 years, Swinson has been a dedicated public servant in state government—a career that has spanned service to the State Police, the ABC, the General Assembly, and this Department. He is joined by boating educators Stacey Brown and Tom Guess. Congratulations, Bob!

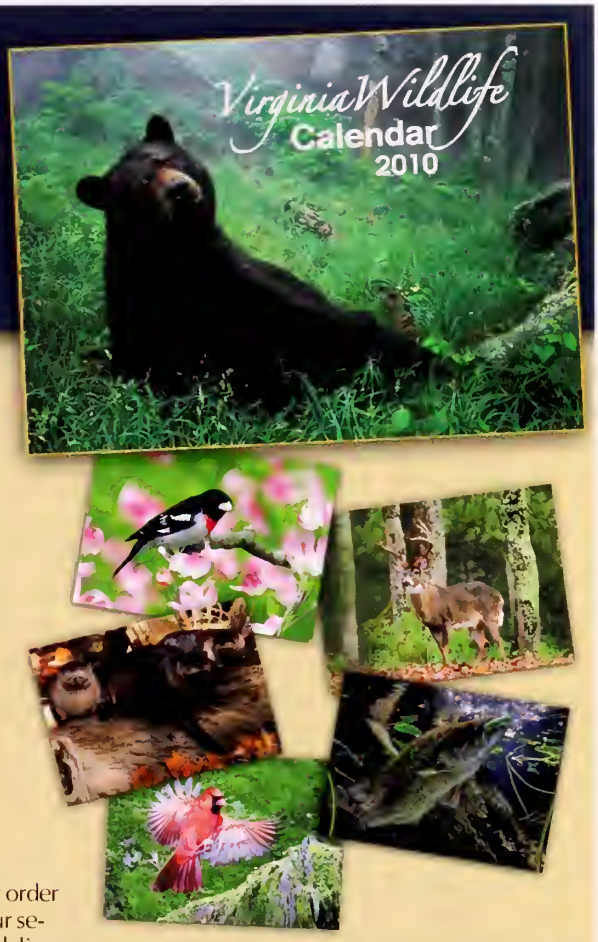
Committee Certifies First Freshwater Fish Over 100 Pounds

Tim Wilson of Natural Bridge (L) receives official recognition from fisheries biologist Bob Greenlee, on behalf of the DGIF State Record Fish Committee, for a new record blue catfish. The fish weighed in at 102 pounds, 4 ounces, and measured 52-3/4 inches in length with a girth of 41-1/2 inches. The first state record fish to break the 100-pound mark was caught by Wilson and fishing buddy Danny Ayers, using cut shad as bait on 30-pound test line below Dutch Gap, a public boat landing on the James River south of Richmond, on May 20, 2009. The fish was so large it took both men to land it.

The Hunter Education Unit conducted a Basic Instructors Workshop at Holiday Lake 4-H Center over the weekend of July 31 through August 2, 2009. In all, 32 new instructors were welcomed to the ranks of over 900 statewide. In this photo, veteran instructor Spud Almond shares his knowledge and experience in shotgun with the new instructors. The next workshop will be held in the spring of 2010. Anyone interested in becoming a Volunteer Hunter Education Instructor should visit www.HuntFishVA.com for more information or email Sgt. David Dodson, state coordinator, at david.dodson@dgif.virginia.gov.

The 2010 *Virginia Wildlife* Calendar

Is Now Available



It's once again time to purchase a Virginia Wildlife calendar—a thoughtful holiday gift that's still a bargain at **$10 each.**

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Correction

Our June 2009 feature, "Making a Difference for Wildlife" by Bruce Ingram, incorrectly traced the history of the Goley farm (pg. 10). The property on which Gene and Laura Goley live has remained in Laura's family—the Radford family—for five generations. We sincerely regret the error. And of note, Gene and Laura Goley were the first property owners in Bedford County to place their land under a conservation easement, which is held by the Virginia Outdoors Foundation.

–SHM

Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries
Outdoor Report
Managing and Conserving Our Wildlife and Natural Resources

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"Now look at what you did! You upset the garbage can and scattered garbage everywhere, son. I'm proud of you."

Dining In

by Ken and Maria Perrotte

Rack of Venison (French Chops) and Baby Portabellas

Looking for a venison recipe that will give your table a touch of elegance and draw an approving nod from dinner guests? It is easier to prepare than it looks.

The next time you process a deer don't bone out those backstraps. Instead, keep the loin (backstrap) attached to the ribs, aim for an appearance similar to what you'd find with a rack of lamb. This takes a little extra time, but pays off in terms of presentation on the plate. The best result with this cut of meat comes with animals that are, ideally, yearlings or younger.

If you're fortunate enough to be able to process your own deer, partially bone out the backstrap along the spinal column, but keep 7 to 8 ribs attached to the loin meat. Avoid cutting into the spinal column. Ribs can be kept at full length or shortened to a manageable 6-7 inches by sawing across the rib cage parallel to the loin.

We often cook the roast as a rack with the rib meat left intact. It's delicious; once cooked, the rack can be cut into individual chops, or cut in half and served as individual portions of 3 or 4.

Venison French Chops and Baby Portabellas

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- Rack (about 8 ribs) from young tender deer
- 2 teaspoons Montreal Steak Seasoning
- 1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar
- 2 tablespoons dry red wine

Pre-heat oven to 400°. Sprinkle seasonings over rack (meat and bones) and rub lightly to coat. Pour oil into Dutch oven or oven-proof sauté pan to cover the bottom. Depending on pan size, a tablespoon or a little more of oil should work. Heat on stovetop over medium-high flame and brown meat on all sides. Deglaze pan with balsamic vinegar and wine. Place in oven for about 10 min. or until slightly undercooked for your taste. (We like it to end up medium to medium-rare.) Remove meat from oven and let it sit about 10 min. Meat will continue to cook and juices will set. Slice into individual chops or serving portions.

Mashed Potatoes

- 4 or 5 Yukon gold potatoes
- 2 teaspoons mayonnaise (we always use Hellman's)
- 2 tablespoons margarine (or butter)
- Salt and pepper to taste

Clean and quarter potatoes. Cook in boiling water until soft but not mushy when pierced by fork. Drain and mash, adding mayonnaise and margarine. Salt and pepper to taste. If you like creamier potatoes, add a couple of ounces of milk.
Optional: Add a few whole garlic cloves to pan and cook with the meat. When done, mash and chop the roasted garlic and add to the potatoes.

Baby Portabellas

- 8 ounce package of baby portabella mushrooms—available in many fine produce sections
- 1 good splash of red wine
- 1 teaspoon of olive oil
- Dash of black pepper and basil
- 1 Garlic clove, chopped

In small pan, heat oil over medium heat; add mushrooms, wine and seasonings, then stir occasionally until mushrooms are thoroughly hot. Takes 4–5 min.

Wine Pairings
Serve entrée with a hearty red steak wine, such as a big cabernet sauvignon that you open and let breathe for a couple of hours before serving. A hearty Argentinean malbec, such as Trivento Reserva, is also a good match. Robust reds from Virginia vintners have paired well with similar quality venison dishes.

A good dinner deserves a good dessert.

Brandied Baked Pears

- 6 firm Bosc or Bartlett pears
- ¼ cup packed light brown sugar
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter
- ½ cup water
- ⅓ cup plus 1 teaspoon brandy
- ⅓ cup chilled heavy cream or a good vanilla ice cream

Preheat oven to 450°. Peel and core pears; coat with brown sugar in a large bowl. Melt butter in a shallow baking dish in oven; add pears, turning to coat with butter. Add water to dish and bake pears, turning over occasionally, until tender and edges are caramelized, 30 to 50 min., depending on pear ripeness.

Transfer pears to a plate. Add brandy to baking dish and stir briskly with a heatproof rubber spatula, deglazing all the sugars sticking to the pan. Place warm pears in serving dishes. Scoop over ice cream or, if using whipped cream, whisk cream in a bowl until it thickens. Don't overdo it! You can use a teaspoon of brandy to whisk into the cream for a little extra flavor up top. Drizzle warm pears with sauce and brandied cream. □

On The Water

by Tom Guess

Myths and Facts About Boating

With winter approaching, this will be my last column for the year. I have enjoyed sharing my stories and experiences with you.

This month I wanted to do something a little different and review some common myths and facts as they pertain to boating laws and regulations. This list is by no means all-inclusive but, rather, compiled from many of the frequent questions boaters have asked over the past year.

Myth: My boat is a Personal Watercraft (PWC) because I use it for personal use.

Fact: This often confuses people since a PWC, more commonly referred to as a "jet ski," is considered a boat but is specifically defined in the Virginia Code as a motorboat less than sixteen feet in length that uses an inboard motor powering a jet pump and is designed to be operated by a person sitting, standing, or kneeling on, rather than in the conventional manner of sitting or standing inside of, the vessel.

Myth: I don't have to register my boat because it only has a trolling motor.

Fact: If you add any machinery propulsion—electric, gasoline, or other motor—to any vessel, it is considered a motorboat and must have a valid registration and display the appropriate numbers.

Myth: I don't need a USCG-Approved Type IV throwable cushion or life-ring on a boat less than 16 feet long.

Fact: In Virginia all boats, with the exception of non-motorized canoes, kayaks, inflatables, or sail boards, must carry a USCG-Approved Type IV throwable device. This law also does not apply to PWC, since they don't have a place to properly carry a throwable device, nor does it apply to a vessel less than 16 feet registered in another state temporarily using Virginia waters.

Myth: My USCG-Approved Type IV throwable must have a 50-foot line attached.

Fact: A USCG Type IV throwable is not required to have any additional line attached.

Myth: My USCG-Approved inflatable must be worn to be accepted.

Fact: A USCG-Approved inflatable does not need to be worn unless the label specifically states, "Must be worn to be approved or accepted." Also, inflatable lifejackets are not approved for use by children under the age of 16 or for high impact water sports (water skiing, riding PWC).

Myth: When I boat in cold weather months, I should dress according to the air temperature.

Fact: When boating in cold weather months, you should dress for the water temperature and wear your lifejacket. Water cools the body 25 times faster than air. You should wear your lifejacket to keep you afloat and to keep as much of your body out of the water as possible. If you do fall in and can get out, get as much of your body out of the water as possible.

Myth: Virginia law is requiring me to have a license to operate a PWC or motorboat.

Fact: Virginia law does not require a license to operate a boat; however, in 2007 the General Assembly enacted legislation to establish a *Boating Safety Education Requirement* that is being phased in over the next several years. It requires the operator of a PWC or a boat with a motor of 10 horsepower or greater to take a boating safety course approved by the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA) and accepted by the Department. There are some provisions for certain boaters to meet this requirement through other means. These can be found on our Web site: www.dgif.virginia.gov/boating/.

If you plan to hunt or fish from a boat this winter, remember you are a boater first! Oftentimes when boaters hunt and fish from a boat they tend to forget the inherent risks associated with being on the water. Boaters also tend to forget that the biggest danger looms when we become complacent to appropriately managing the risks that can be associated with boating.

Until next spring: Be Responsible, Be Safe, and Have Fun! □

Tom Guess, U. S. Coast Guard (Ret.), serves as a statewide coordinator for the Boating Safety Education Program at the DGIF.

Photo Tips

by Lynda Richardson

Sometimes I Don't Want to Take Any Pictures!

Despite the thrill of photographing some of the most fascinating animals, places, and people in the world, occasionally I just want to absorb a scene without the distraction of making great images. For me, capturing a moment photographically is an all-consuming activity. I joke with other photographers about it but it's true. When I'm photographing, I am so absorbed in the situation that I can't talk and I definitely can't hold a conversation!

I can understand why this happens. The main reason I got into photography was because of my love for the natural world. As a little kid, I absorbed books on nature by the carload, watched *Wild Kingdom* every day, and spent nearly all of my free time exploring the woods near our Richmond home. My parents encouraged this love of the outdoors, sometimes showing me cool critters they had found but also putting up with the occasional errant snake found tangled in the hair of my sister's favorite doll. (I SWEAR I don't know how it got there!)

Nature provides deep spiritual experiences for me. It keeps me grounded as to what is important in life and it never fails to teach me something new. A bright-eyed fawn discovered in a meadow fills my heart with the promise of miracles, while gazing up into a star-filled night convinces me of a force greater than me. If I'm trying to take pictures of these wonderful things, I'm usually distracted by composition and camera settings and anticipating the right moment to trip the shutter.

The next time you go out to photograph the natural world, take time to simply be there. Absorb the sounds, smells, and sights. Feel the wind brush against your face. Reflect on why you are there and what you are trying to accomplish. It will help you obtain better insight into your subjects and your photography. It also will help you better understand yourself and the remarkable world in which we live.

I was able to capture a few photographs of this fledgling osprey landing on its nest in the Rappahannock River but, afterwards, we enjoyed a gorgeous sunset. Sometimes just watching your subjects can be as exciting as photographing them. © Lynda Richardson

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You are invited to submit one to five of your best photographs to "Image of the Month," Virginia Wildlife Magazine, P.O. Box 11104, 4010 West Broad Street, Richmond, VA 23230-1104. Send original slides, super high-quality prints, or high-res jpeg, tiff, or raw files on a disk and include a self-addressed, stamped envelope or other shipping method for return. Also, please include any pertinent information regarding how and where you captured the image and what camera and settings you used, along with your phone number. We look forward to seeing and sharing your work with our readers.

CLARIFICATION

The June 2009 Photo Tips advocated using electronic calling devices and decoys to lure birds in to photograph them. The use of these devices can seriously disrupt breeding and territorial behaviors and waste valuable energy reserves that are needed to care for young, endure extreme weather, or complete migration. The Virginia Society of Ornithology and the American Birding Association have published a *Code of Birding Ethics* that states birders should "limit the use of recordings and other methods of attracting birds, especially during peak migration and breeding season, and never use such methods in heavily birded areas." Lures or calls shouldn't be used where threatened, endangered, or special concern species might occur. It should be noted that at some locations (such as national wildlife refuges), the use of electronic calls is prohibited. Please remember to be an ethical birder! Watch and photograph wildlife from a distance and keep disturbance to a minimum.

Image of the Month

Congratulations go to Frank Kruszyna of Christiansburg for his awesome photograph of white-tailed deer drinking from the Jackson River in Lowmoor. Great Spotting! Nikon D50 digital camera, 200 mm lens, ISO not recorded, 1/500th, f.5.6.

VIRGINIA WILDLIFE OUTDOOR CATALOG

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